

Draft Economic Development Strategy 2023 - 2026

For Cabinet

Summary

Lead Member: Councillor Justine Rutland, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

Lead Director: Lee Colyer

Head of Service: David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Property

Report Author: Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager

Classification: Public document (non-exempt)

Wards Affected: All

Approval Timetable	Date
Management Board	19 June 2023
Portfolio Holder	27 June 2023
Communities & Economic Development	12 July 2023
Cabinet	27 July 2023

Recommendations

1. Agree publication of the Draft Economic Development Strategy for the period 2023 –2026, for a 6-week consultation period from the beginning of September 2023.
2. Following engagement with businesses and partner organisations, bring a final version of the Strategy back to Cabinet for consideration, approval and adoption.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement for the publication of the Draft Borough Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan for the period 2023 - 2026, for a 6-week consultation period from the beginning of September 2023.
- 1.2 The previous Economic Development Strategy was published in 2018. There have been significant changes to the national and local economy since then and therefore a review of the previous Strategy and preparation of an update was required.

2. Draft Economic Development Strategy

- 2.1 The previous Economic Development Strategy was prepared in 2017/18 and is now out of date. A review of the previous strategy was carried out and research commissioned to support the preparation of a new Strategy and Action Plan.
- 2.2 The draft ED Strategy is aligned with other Council documents including the Borough Plan, the Submitted Local Plan and the emerging Climate Change Strategy.
- 2.3 The aims set out in the Strategy are as follows:
- Develop a sustainable, and inclusive local economy - that delivers for local businesses and communities, respecting the natural and built heritage in the borough.
 - Work with partners to create a business support offer that provides the best opportunities to start, grow, and invest in businesses and destinations across the borough.
 - Work with partners including Town & Parish Councils to create safe and vibrant towns and villages in the borough, where businesses and communities will thrive.
- 2.4 The headline objectives in the plan are as follows:
- Aiming for Net Zero
 - Creating Destinations
 - Encouraging enterprise and employment

- Supporting Rural Communities
 - Improving sustainable access and connectivity
- 2.5 An Action Plan is included within the Draft document with actions (under each of the objectives above), timescales, partner organisations and measures of success set out.
- 2.6 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed to consider the Strategy's impact on those with protected characteristics. This will be updated with further data collected in the proposed consultation.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1 The only alternative option considered was not to prepare a borough Economic Development Strategy but instead to be guided by existing policy documents prepared at county, regional or national level, to plan the work of the Economic Development Team.

4. Preferred Option and Reason

- 4.1 A decision was taken to prepare a Strategy for the borough including an Action Plan to ensure that the key issues relating to economic development in Tunbridge Wells are recognised and addressed where possible.
- 4.2 The Strategy will encourage engagement with local businesses through the consultation process and the document will be a basis for bidding for project funding in the future, as opportunities arise. The Action Plan will guide the work programme for the Economic Development Team from 2023 - 2026.

5. Consultation on Options

- 5.1 There has been no consultation on options to date. However, a comprehensive engagement programme will be undertaken on the draft Strategy including the following elements:
- Use of the Council's Engagement platform: Talking Point.
 - Engagement with local businesses through the Council's Business Newsletter and social media channels.
 - Engagement with local business representative organisations for example Royal Tunbridge Wells Together BID and the Paddock Wood Business Association (with meetings where appropriate).

- Wider community engagement through the Council's Resident's Newsletter, Town and Parish Councils and TWBC's main social media channels.
- Engagement with all partner organisations as listed in Appendix B of the Strategy including meetings as required.

Recommendation from Cabinet Advisory Board

5.2 At the Communities and Economic Development Cabinet Advisory Board meeting on 12 July, the Board accepted the recommendation to publish the Draft Strategy for consultation with the following suggested amendments or additions to be considered:

- Acknowledge full range of causes of increased energy costs under cost of living crisis reference.
- Reference that there is a need to ensure an appropriate spread of economic activity in the borough.
- Review reference to charging infrastructure for electric vehicles to highlight importance of this.
- Explain what is intended in reference to Tourist Information Points.
- Insert additional text to highlight the importance of horticulture, agriculture and farming in the borough and the need to develop skilled workforce for the future.
- Acknowledge the importance of Southborough as the gateway into Royal Tunbridge Wells (and a town in its own right). Consider actions relating to vacant units, the town centre streetscene, and the underutilisation of new Civic Centre.

5.3 Please note that captions will also be added to the images included in the document before publication for consultation.

6. Implementation

6.1 Following the engagement programme to gain feedback on the Strategy, amendments will be made to the document as appropriate, and a final version of the Strategy will be brought to Cabinet for agreement and adoption.

7. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Draft Economic Development Strategy

8. Cross Cutting Issues

A. Legal (including the Human Rights Act)

No implications

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

B. Finance and Other Resources

The Strategy will be delivered within the existing budgets of the Economic Development Team.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

C. Staffing

No Implications

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

D. Risk Management

Risks for the Strategy relate to ability to deliver actions set out in the Action Plan. These are reliant on work with partner organisations and other external factors at both the local and national level. The Action Plan will be reviewed every 6 months.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

E. Environment (inc. Biodiversity) and Sustainability

The ED Strategy is aligned with the Council's emerging Climate Change Strategy & Action Plan.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

F. Community Safety

No implications for the Strategy but further assessments will be undertaken on a project basis.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

G. Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Economic Development Strategy, in line with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010). This requires decision makers to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups.

The Economic Development Team will include those with protected characteristics in the consultation process for this Strategy, to ensure that further consideration is given to the outlined policies and initiatives that could impact upon them.

The findings of the consultation will be presented following its completion.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 04.07.23

H. Data Protection

There are no data protection issues for this Strategy but further assessment will be made on a project basis.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

I. Health and Safety

No implications for the overall Strategy. Risk assessments will be undertaken on a project basis.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23

J. Health and Wellbeing

No implications for overall Strategy but further assessment will be undertaken on a project basis.

Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, 08.06.23